

Rural round-up



Kath Aplin
Large Animal Vet
(West)

Many of us vets at VetSouth originate from other parts of the world. The mix of cultures and experience is a real strength of the team, and is one of the things I enjoy about working here.

I joined VetSouth for the second time in September last year – returning to Southland after 20 years. The first time was way back in 2003, when I came over from the UK to work with what was then Central Southland Vets, in a small clinic with eight vets and a few support staff. Now, all this time later, my husband and I decided to return!

So, what's changed in the last 20 years?

The 'new' clinic that seemed huge when being planned in 2003 is now fully occupied, with a big team of vets, vet techs, nurses and support staff. We didn't have vet techs back in 2003, but now it's hard to imagine how we managed without them!

It goes without saying that there are more dairy cows. Looking at the figures, dairy cow numbers in Southland have more than doubled since 2003, when there were around 300,000 dairy cows (similar to the number of deer).

In 2003, many dairy farms were new conversions. Coming back after 20 years, it's noticeable how much the industry has consolidated, and it now attracts people from all over the world to work here. I've enjoyed meeting people from many different countries and all sorts of diverse backgrounds over the last six months.

What hasn't changed are the amazing national parks that are still as much fun to explore. Twenty years on it just takes a little longer to recover!

In-clinic mastitis testing options

by Sunita McGrath

We have two different machines in-clinic that we can use for mastitis milk sample testing – but what's the difference between them?

The DairySmart Jupiter machine, which has been available since last year, uses traditional agar plates and an incubator. However, it uses modern AI to detect what bacteria species are present.

The Mastatest machine, which has been around for a few years, can run up to four cartridges for clinical mastitis or eight samples of subclinical mastitis, in a 22-hour turnaround period.

Here are the pros and cons of both:

Jupiter Pros

- Identifies a wider range of bacteria, and any the AI does not recognise are sent to human experts for analysis.
- Can culture out if there is blood-tinge in the sample.
- If there is no growth after 24 hours, the culture can still continue for 48 hours for slower growing colonies.
- Can have a large number of tests running simultaneously.



Jupiter Cons

- Does not give antibiotic sensitivities.
- Requires manual picture catchment at the 24 and 48-hour stages.

Mastatest Pros

- Will give antibiotic sensitivities as well as bacteria growth.
- Will pick up the common causes of mastitis.
- Has the ability to test samples from high cell count cows.

Mastatest Cons

- Can only run a small number of tests at once.
- Cannot test blood-tinged milk, very clotted milk, or a sample with dirt in it.
- The 22-hour cut-off does not allow for slow growing bacteria.

ON-FARM FOCUS



DAIRY



- BCS cows and dry off any light cows early.
- Test for Johnes at final herd test.
- Have an Annual Milk Quality Review with us (formerly a Dry Cow Consult).
- Prep for dry off and plan your cull list.
- Schedule some pre-winter trace element tests for heifers.
- FEC test calves and drench if necessary.
- RSVP for your local Repro Round Up!

BEEF



- Pregnancy scanning.
- Pre-winter trace element tests.

SHEEP



- Mating underway.
- Drench check stock (10 samples, 7-14 days after drenching). Parasites change during the different seasons, so it's important to do multiple FEC drench checks each year.

DEER



- Stag rut management.
- Test copper and selenium levels.

WORKING DOGS



- Remember monthly tablets for Sheep Measles prevention.

Wearables vs. non-wearables repro results

by Christine Utting

As we come to the end of another busy scanning season, we're often asked how reproduction results are trending and whether farms using wearable technologies (like collars or tags) are performing any better than those without.

Below is a brief overview of the results so far from our farms in the East (Gore, Tapanui, Clydevale and Balclutha areas). Note: This doesn't include data from our Winton clients.

As you can see, the results are broadly similar – particularly the 6-week in-calf rates, with only a 0.1% difference between the two groups.

GROUP	3WK IN-CALF RATE	6WK IN-CALF RATE	NOT-IN-CALF RATE	MATING LENGTH	CONCEPTION RATE
All	47.2%	69.6%	14.8%	75.4 days	52.4%
Wearable	48.5%	69.6%	15.9%	75 days	52.5%
Non-wearable	46.0%	69.5%	13.8%	76 days	52.2%

From this dataset, wearable farms have a 2.5% higher 3-week in-calf rate and a 0.3% higher conception rate.

Not-in-calf-rates are 2.1% higher on wearable farms and mating periods are, on average, one day shorter. However, it is important to consider that **wearable farms may be deliberately marking some cows as "Do not breed"**, who will then not be drafted even if on heat, which impacts these final empty results.

More of our wearable farms are doing AI for the entire duration of mating, but some are still using bulls too.

My conclusion from this initial data is that **using wearable technology is not any better than well-executed manual heat detection for mating**, and if you choose to use wearables to monitor your herd, it's unlikely to significantly impact your reproductive performance.

You'll have to come along to your local **Repro Round Up** event at the start of May to see this season's scanning results in full!

Dry off checklist

by Daniel Cragg

- Body condition score herd and either put lighter cows onto once-a-day milking or dry them off early – prioritising condition now will positively impact next season's production and repro performance.
- Get pre-drying off PP+ trace element tests done to review how your mineral mix throughout the season has performed, and make sure your cows have the right levels for the upcoming dry period.
- Bulk milk test for parasite exposure levels to see if your cows need drenched.
- Complete Lepto vaccination and other vaccinations, and consider ordering Rotavirus vaccine.
- Herd test to work out which cows have high cell counts, helping you make decisions around Dry Cow Therapy (DCT) vs. Teat Seal, and which cows to cull.
- Arrange dry off transition plans (remember to slowly transition diet if going onto crops like fodder beet).
- Book with your KeyVet: an Annual Milk Quality Review, any final scanning sessions, heifer teat sealing, and DCT assistance.

20 years of Sunni Southland days

Senior large animal vet Sunita McGrath has penned her thoughts on her first 20 years with VetSouth. Below is a brief excerpt, but we recommend scanning this QR code to read her full story!



I was one of the lucky kids, at the age of five I knew exactly what I was going to do when I grew up. A 'calling'. One day I just announced to my parents, "I'm going to be a vet".

...
I was a mixed animal vet at the start, performing surgeries on all species. I even once had to find out for an owner if their pet turtle was dead or just hibernating – trickier than you'd think!

...
My cow skills were required on farm, and I spent less time in the clinic and more time driving around the district.

...
Fast forward 20 years later... here I am, still. I had a student ask me a while ago, "How do you keep doing the same thing year after year for so long?". She almost made me sound a bit boring and dull. I have, however, asked myself this question several times, especially when the alarm goes off at 2.30am and I drive an hour to my job with my beloved sausage dog, Twiggy, on my lap.

...
When I think about it though, the reason I've stayed in this job this long is people.



Transporting cull cows

When sending cows to the works, just getting them out of the paddock and loading them straight onto the truck isn't enough and can cause animal welfare issues. This isn't something you want for your girls (and you don't want fines either!).

Check out some important things to consider before transporting cull cows in the article linked below.

Scan for some transport tips.



Selenium levels in sheep

by Donna Hamilton

Over the past 2-3 years, our vets have been seeing many **sheep selenium test results coming back as either low (less than 4) or marginal (between 4-10).**

Low levels can result from a combination of less fertiliser and prill application, and in some seasons fast grass growth means less mineral uptake.

These tables show a summary of recent results:

2023	NUMBER TESTED	AMOUNT DEFICIENT	AMOUNT MARGINAL
Gore	529	16%	26%
Tapanui	107	7%	26%
Winton	326	29%	30%

2024	NUMBER TESTED	AMOUNT DEFICIENT	AMOUNT MARGINAL
Gore	262	22%	15%
Tapanui	288	14%	29%
Winton	279	26%	47%

Most of these tests are from mixed-age ewes during the pre-tup or pre-lamb periods. We work with the farmer to decide when to test, with the aim of getting the best information.

Low levels can be corrected with a number of different treatments. However, **long-acting selenium injection has given a number of these farmers confidence that selenium will be adequate in their sheep for at least a year.**

If you have not tested your ewes in the last 12 months, then any time now is a good time to check their levels.

Give us a call to book in – we can even do them on your trailer if you want to bring some sheep to the clinic.



Oh no, don't say, "Cheese!"



by Chanté Kritzinger

Let's start this on a cheesy note... What did the cheese say when it looked in the mirror? Halloumi!

Cheesy gland (also called caseous lymphadenitis or lympho) is a chronic disease in sheep and goats caused by *Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis*.

Why is it important to be aware of?

Cheesy gland is insidious, usually noticed only when it's well-established, and difficult to eradicate from contaminated environments (it can survive up to eight months on shearing shed floors and in holding yards). It's hard to treat, highly contagious, and heavy on the wallet from carcass condemnations, ill-thrift and poor fertility.

What does it look like?

Infected animals form abscesses, which pop up wherever lymph nodes are, such as on the jaw angle, in front of the shoulder, or at the flank fold. These abscesses rupture and ooze yellow/green pus – hence the name 'cheesy gland'. These infections can also spread to lungs and other organs.

How does it spread?

Shearing and dipping poses the greatest risk for cheesy gland to spread, as infected animals will contaminate

equipment and dip. Transmission can occur through direct contact, as well as inhalation or ingestion of the pus or bacteria. If an animal's skin gets nicked during shearing or by hazards in the shed or yards, the spread of bacteria will be even more likely.

The disease is often seen in older stock, simply because they will have had more opportunities to contract it. However, it can start showing up in lambs in heavily contaminated environments.

How can I control the disease?

- Isolate and cull infected animals.
- Never lance abscesses as this will increase environmental contamination!
- Disinfect shears, ear tag applicators, etc. regularly.
- Remove environmental hazards that can cause skin injuries.
- Do young animals first when shearing or dipping, and move them out of the yards as soon as possible.
- Quarantine new stock.
- Consider vaccinating with Ultravac 5in1 or Eweguard.

Get in touch for help if you have cases of cheesy gland – as this is not the cheese you want on your plate!

BVD in bulls



by Brad Shaw

Most of the time we think of Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) as a disease that affects the cow and the unborn calf, but BVD will also negatively affect the bulls themselves.

Transiently infected (TI) bulls will shed the virus in their semen while they are infected, reducing the quality of the semen.

All breeding bulls should have been vaccinated to prevent them from getting infected by any TI or PI (persistently infected) animals that they come into contact with. This is not always done unfortunately.

Because of this, it is up to you to look into the background of your bulls.

When you are buying in or leasing bulls, it is important that you confirm they have received the appropriate vaccinations before they come onto your farm.

It is also a good idea to make sure they have been individually blood tested for the BVD antigen, to check they are not PI bulls themselves that will spread BVD to your other animals.

BVD in cows tends to cause underlying production loss. However, if the disease comes into a herd over the critical period of mating, it can have a significant effect on calving rate as well.

Prevention is key to minimise the effects BVD can have on cattle health.

Working dogs in autumn

by Hugh Hasselman

With peak workloads easing as we head towards winter, this can be a good time to look into any health issues in your working dogs.

Flea numbers have been higher this summer. **Check that your dogs and kennels are clear of fleas** now, before they cause any further buildup of flea eggs and larvae in kennel floors and bedding.

Incidences of sheep measles are low on Southland farms. This indicates good disease control measures by our southern farmers, but they need to be maintained for ongoing protection. So, ensure you **continue to implement your worming programme** during autumn.

Lameness due to musculoskeletal injuries or osteoarthritis may be improved with accurate diagnosis, treatment and rest. Osteoarthritis,

particularly in the stifle, hock, and carpal joints, makes the degenerative joint more prone to developing into septic arthritis after high summer workloads. If you suspect an issue, see your vet.

Toe infections are a common problem in working dogs – especially in cold, wet, dirty feet at this time of year. They can develop from trauma to the foot or nail bed, as bacteria gets into the injury from soil or animal faeces. **Make sure that your kenneling has dry footing, and pay attention to long, overgrown toenails** that are at risk of splitting or tearing. Early treatment of injuries and infections is best, as in bad cases amputation of a toe may be required. Toes and pads with poorly healing wounds, splits or ulcers may be helped with the application of a salve.

The bacteria introduced through foot trauma, small wounds to the skin, dental disease, etc. can spread via the blood stream to the heart, lungs, liver and kidneys. In a recent case, a working dog had failure of the heart valves and damage to other organs, due to a blood infection with a *Streptococcus* bacterium that is commonly found in cattle faeces.



Dental disease in working dogs is often the result of damage to the teeth from working with livestock, vehicle accidents, or just wear and tear from gnawing bones and other chewing behaviours. **Veterinary investigations with dental radiographs can determine if any tooth extractions are needed** to avoid infections, bone loss and pain.

Mammary gland tumours are relatively common in female working dogs because not many are spayed. Examine your dog's mammary glands regularly, and talk to your vet if lumps are increasing in size or number.

Beware of autumn poisoning hazards such as the ingestion of rat bait or antifreeze (dogs will drink the sweet-tasting chemical that may be drained onto the ground when cleaning radiators and replenishing coolant for winter). Both of these poisonings require urgent veterinary advice and care.

Clinic corner



Getting off-farm!

Conquering the Gorge

We were proud sponsors of the VetSouth Gorge Adventure Race for the third time this March. It was their biggest event yet, with 300 participants ranging from seasoned adventure racers to family teams. This year it moved to a different location, the stunning Otapiri Gorge, for a new challenge. It was great to see so many getting active out in our epic backyard. If you haven't given this race a go yet, start planning your team for next year.

Farmers on the fairway

Our Winton crew held a Golf Day for their local farmers. Golf newbies and golf old-hands alike braved grey skies for an afternoon of social ambrose golf, followed by a BBQ and one or two drinks. We hope everyone who joined us had a great time!



Save the date for Repro Round Up

We're excited to once again invite our dairy farming clients to Repro Round Up, our annual dinner to celebrate the end of the dairy season.

It's our way of saying thank you for using our services, while also looking at how the season has gone through the repro data we've rounded up.

We're hosting a dinner in Gore, Winton, and Balclutha (a new location this year). Come along to your nearest event for a great evening! More details to follow.

Balclutha - Tuesday 6th May
Winton - Wednesday 7th May
Gore - Thursday 8th May



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